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AUTHOR French, Martha M.

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ABSTRACT

This guide to developing literacy skills with deaf and hard of hearing children stresses the flexible use of various methods based on the needs of individual children. The paper begins by examining selected methods and approaches to literacy instruction, citing ways that these might or might not benefit students depending upon implementation. This section is followed by discussion on the application of seven guidelines for planning literacy instruction. These address: (1) a broad view of literacy and the interdependency of various elements of development; (2) instruction and assessment guided by individual patterns of development; (3) language use that is fully accessible and comprehensible in various settings; (4) language role clarification and instruction based on awareness of the languages used by the student; (5) a model of inquiry for literacy learning across the curriculum; (6) a structured, balanced program for teaching reading and writing; and (7) selection of important top-down and bottom-up skills and strategies for teaching reading and writing. The paper also stresses literacy instruction within the broader goals of education and the importance of the social climate in the classroom. (Contains 35 references.) (DB)

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Planning for Literacy: Guidelines for Instruction

by
Martha M. French

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Laurent Clerc National Deaf Education Center
Gallaudet University, Washington, D.C.

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Product Inquiries
KDES PAS-6
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E-mail: Marteal.Pitts@gallaudet.edu

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Sharing Ideas

The Laurent Clerc National Deaf Education Center's (formerly Pre-College National Mission Programs) "Sharing Ideas" series is comprised of working or occasional papers and videos of interest to parents and teachers of deaf and hard of hearing children, researchers, school administrators, support service personnel, and policy makers. Works in the series are often prepared for a specific 'occasion,' and include papers, presentations, or final reports that address a need in the field or contribute to the growing body of knowledge about educating deaf and hard of hearing children. The intent of the series is to act as a clearinghouse for sharing information from a number of sources.

These widely disseminated papers cover a broad range of timely topics, from describing innovative teaching strategies to reviewing the literature in an area of inquiry to summarizing the results of a research study. In every case, there is a common focus: improving the quality of education for children who are deaf or hard of hearing. The Clerc Center welcomes feedback about the concepts presented, particularly in the case of 'working papers,' which often represent works in progress or express the views or experiences of an author.

Researchers, graduate students, parents, and teachers are encouraged to send proposals for review and possible inclusion in the Sharing Ideas series. Submissions to the series are reviewed by content experts before acceptance for publication as Clerc Center products.

There's More!

This paper is an excerpt from *Starting With Assessment: A Developmental Approach to Deaf Children's Literacy*, by Martha M. French. This section—about literacy planning and instruction—represents a final chapter in the book, which presents guidelines, strategies, and tools for assessing deaf children's language and literacy development. The two-volume set includes both the text and a toolkit section (which contains assessment tools and checklists) for teachers, administrators, literacy specialists, parents, and others who are interested in the development of deaf children's language and literacy. It can be obtained from the address listed on the back of the title page of this paper.

About the Author

Martha Manson French, M.Ed., is an educational writer in reading development with the Success for All Foundation, Inc. For many years she was employed with Pre-College National Mission Programs at Gallaudet University where she worked to develop and facilitate the implementation of the language arts program for Kendall School. Ms. French has a variety of work experiences in programs for deaf children, including: state school dormitory counselor, elementary school teacher, resource teacher, teacher-trainer, and curriculum specialist. She has been a frequent contributor in the past to *Perspectives in Education and Deafness* and other publications with articles about language and literacy.

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Planning for Literacy Instruction

For years, in fact almost two centuries, we have searched for the key to the language education of deaf children.... As I review the various approaches and perspectives...utilized today in the education of deaf children, I want to emphasize that no ***single*** *(emphasis added) one of these holds the key....*

(Fischgrund, 1996, p. 2,)

There is a belief that the pursuit of better methods of instruction leads to or has led to the improvement of achievement in literacy. The point, of course, is to remedy the deficiencies of text-based literacy in children and adolescents who are deaf...many educators might not even be aware of the growing consensus that the notion of good or bad methods is itself misguided.

(Paul, 1998, p. 140)

There are many opinions about the best approach to instructing deaf children in literacy. Often these opinions reveal themselves in the methods or approaches programs used to improve the quality of instruction. Students benefit in varying degrees from practices based on many of these methods. Just as often, however, the methods fail to bring about the expected significant differences in achievement, in both individuals and groups of students. One of the reasons for this could be that educators often look to individual methods or approaches as the "key" that will open the door to deaf children's achievement in literacy. When one approach does not result in significant, anticipated changes in achievement, energy is invested in another approach or method. However, as indicated with the quotes above, there is in fact no such "key" or best method. The task of improving deaf children's literacy must be approached with multiple, interdependent goals organized over time. The results should help define educational practices that are effective with specific students or groups of students.

The goal of this paper is to indicate that methodology is second to individual need. It is the *flexible* use of methods based on the needs of individual children that determines instructional effectiveness. Deciding how to use methods, given this premise, should be directed with a set of guidelines that are congruent with theories about learning for language, literacy, and deaf children. Planning for literacy starts with these theories and guidelines. Methods, approaches, and even models of instruction should follow, defining how programs will carry out these basic guidelines.

This paper begins by examining selected methods and approaches to literacy instruction, citing ways that these might benefit students—or not—depending upon implementation. That section is followed by seven guidelines for planning literacy instruction, based on the same broad theories about learning that support the principles of assessment described in Chapter One of *Starting with Assessment: A Developmental Approach to Deaf Children's Literacy* (French, 1999).[1] Readers are advised to remember the interdependency of these guidelines—that each supports the implementation and effectiveness of the others. The paper closes with a reminder, too, that the guidelines, and all planning for literacy, should be considered within the broader context of educational goals and within the social context of learning for each individual.

1 This paper is an excerpt from *Starting with Assessment: A Developmental Approach to Deaf Children's Literacy*, by Martha M. French. This section on instruction represents a final chapter in the book, which presents guidelines, strategies, and tools for assessing deaf children's language and literacy development. The text and toolkit section (which contains assessment tools and checklists) can be obtained from the address listed on the back of the title page of this paper.

Considering Methods and Approaches

In reality, any one approach or method can either work in ways that benefit students in their pursuit of literacy or can serve to work against their development. Take, for example, the following list of approaches that might be used to improve instruction for literacy:

1. ***Select the best curriculum or commercial reading and writing program.***
2. ***Hire the best teachers.***
3. ***Focus more instructional time and energy on reading and writing.***
4. ***Use better diagnostics and remedial strategies to improve reading and writing skills.***
5. ***Immerse children in good literature.***
6. ***Spend more time on the direct instruction of English language and reading skills.***
7. ***Converse with students in American Sign Language (ASL) socially and in academic contexts.***
8. ***Develop bilingual programs (ASL as the first language, written English as the second).***

Benefits and Cautions

Each of the above approaches, as described below, has potential merits and drawbacks, depending on how it is applied.

1. ***Select the best curriculum or commercial reading and writing program.***

Benefits: Commercial materials and curricula can be a source of information for instructional guidelines and ideas for activities. Furthermore, many commercial programs now include excellent children's literature, with the stories arranged according to approximate grade levels. This information is helpful in matching materials to a child's appropriate reading level.

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Cautions: When programs invest heavily in finding the "best" program to use, they may be perceiving these materials as the primary source of instructional information and the "answer" to their instructional difficulties. This often leads to doggedly following the program's sequence of skills for instructional goals, rather than using assessment information about students' developmental strengths and needs. As discussed in *Starting with Assessment*, relying on commercial or other curricular materials as the primary source of instructional goals may present problems for the following reasons: 1) there may be a mismatch between individual development and these goals; 2) commercial materials base instruction on assumptions about children—their communicative competency, background knowledge, and early experiences in literacy (in other words, many students, deaf *and* hearing, do not fit the implied profile); and 3) commercial materials represent a skill-sequenced view of learning that does not accurately reflect the complexity of literacy—both the interdependency of multiple areas of development and the holistic nature of that development.

*2. **Hire the best teachers.***

Benefits: Certain teachers seem to stand out for their instructional expertise. These teachers usually have high expectations for their students; implement well-structured, creative, programs; and tend to bring out the best in their students. There is no doubt that a child benefits from having a teacher like this—one who knows how to capitalize on his or her students' strengths and effectively address instructional needs.

Cautions: Teachers' styles and personalities vary, often making even the "best" teachers more effective for some students than for others. These differences should be taken into account. Teachers' effectiveness, however, ultimately should be measured according to the goal of facilitating students' long-term development—the cumulative effects of years of teaching and planning—rather then the degree of success any one teacher has within a single year. Within the same program, teachers bring to the task of instruction different paradigms about learning and the development of literacy—beliefs that influence the way they teach and assess. As a result, teachers may be considered "good" at their job to the degree that they share paradigms with those passing judgment. Consequently, it is possible for a student to have a good teacher one year and a good teacher the next year, according to different opinions about teaching and learning, and yet experience vastly different approaches to instruction. When that happens, instructional inconsistency within a program can fail to build students' development over time. It is hard for students to make gains over time, or beyond the current year, if there is little continuity within the program in its approaches to instruction.

3. Focus more instructional time and energy on reading and writing.

Benefits: There should be a well-balanced program for reading and writing for all students, with structured activities occurring daily. The form of these activities will change as students mature, gradually incorporating more guided instruction in reading and writing within the context of authentic reading and writing tasks. Students need more time on these tasks and less time on isolated skill exercises.

Cautions: There are at least three ways in which this approach can ultimately fail students. First of all, it could represent an approach that narrowly defines literacy as text-based skills, or competence in reading and writing. Focusing literacy instruction on reading and writing alone will defeat the purpose of spending more time developing these skills if related areas of development (e.g., conversational language, motivation, etc.) are neglected. A second way this approach might fail is if large blocks of time are devoted to instruction in reading and writing, but the instruction is devoid of subject matter from other curricular areas. A third way of misusing this approach is by increasing time spent on paper-and-pencil exercises that do not involve students in the actual tasks of reading and writing.

4. Use better diagnostics and remedial strategies to improve reading and writing skills:

Benefits: Most of the book from which this paper is derived (see "There's More" on p. V for details) stresses the concept that assessment is important to instruction in literacy. The first chapter points out that assessment should find out what a student knows, what skills he or she has, and what his or her instructional needs are in order to plan effective instruction.

Cautions: The words used in this assumption connote the need for caution. The terms "diagnostic" and "remedial" often represent approaches to instruction based on the view that if students do not have certain skills and knowledge by a certain grade or age, then something is wrong with them—they have a problem that must be diagnosed and fixed (Johnston & Allington, 1991). Such approaches are not developmental and may be counterproductive to instructional efforts. Developmental perspectives view growth in literacy as a matter of individual course, varying in pattern according to a student's strengths and needs at any given time. Assessment focuses on determining these instructional strengths and needs rather than "diagnosing" the problem. While this may seem like a matter of semantics, the developmental perspective carries a more positive outlook that is likely to filter down to the student, influencing his or her own self-perceptions and motivation to learn.

5. Immerse children in good literature.

Benefits: Independent reading—reading for pleasure—is a critical factor in helping many children learn to read and write, whether they are deaf or hearing. What children learn as a result of developing this habit will *far* outweigh any amount or kind of instruction they receive. Independent reading provides students with abundant comprehensible input about written English—more than they can ever hope to learn through instruction (Krashen, 1992). The development of this habit starts early when young children experience the pleasures of looking at books and being read to by others. Emphasizing a love for good literature, both at home and in school, facilitates the acquisition of this habit.

Cautions: Many readers are aware that this assumption has been taken to the extreme in some instructional programs for deaf, and even hearing, children. Often children do acquire a knowledge of reading and writing naturally—in fact, all do to some degree—but most do not learn to read and write this way exclusively. They need guided instruction in these skills. Instruction, moreover, is a matter of finding the right balance between creating conditions that foster acquisition (such as immersing children in good literature) and learning through purposeful demonstration and explicit explanation of the features of language and concepts of literacy.

6. Spend more time on direct instruction of English language and reading skills.

Benefits: Research has indicated many areas and contexts in which direct instruction can improve areas of development in literacy. For example, the literature on strategy use, described later in this paper, indicates there are strategies that good readers use to comprehend text that can be made explicit to poor readers with direct explanation (e.g., Baker & Brown, 1984; Garner, 1987; Paris, Wasik, Turner, 1991; Pressley, Johnson, Symons, McGoldrick, & Kurita, 1989). Also, deaf students who have not acquired competence in conversational language during early childhood need instruction in language in addition to continued efforts that support acquisition.

Cautions: Just as there is research indicating the benefits of direct instruction, there is also research indicating situations in which this is not the case. When rules about language—grammar instruction—are taught out of context and assumed to transfer to reading and writing, for example, this transfer does not appear to occur (Krashen, 1984). Demonstration and direct instruction are most likely to be effective when used to teach skills and strategies *as needed* (e.g., developmentally appropriate) and within the context of authentic reading and writing activities. Furthermore, instruction must include the application of learned skills and strate-

gies in multiple contexts. Direct instruction involves thoughtful consideration of what to teach, when, and how.

*7. **Converse with students in ASL socially and in academic contexts.***

Benefits: Conversing with students in ASL for social and academic purposes is increasingly recognized as important to the education of many deaf children (e.g., Israelite, et al., 1989; Johnson, Liddell, & Erting, 1989; Lane, 1992; Mahshie, 1995). As the natural language of deaf people in this country, ASL—its acquisition and use—allows deaf children, the majority of whom need a visual language, to experience conversational language for all the purposes for which language is intended. In addition, the early acquisition and use of this language builds a knowledge base, both of language and concepts, that supports further learning. The use of ASL also represents cultural recognition for many students, undoubtedly boosting self-esteem and motivation—critical affective variables in the development of literacy. Those who need a visual language and grow up in an environment that is rich in the conversational use of ASL are likely to have language skills and knowledge that will assist their development in many ways.

Cautions: Decisions about language use should always take into account the linguistic needs and preferences of the individual child. The goal of language choice is to provide accessible input and to facilitate early acquisition (Mahshie, 1995). Therefore, for each child with a hearing loss, assessment should aim to determine the language and conditions that will best meet that goal. In addition to whether the child needs visual access to language—which will be true for the vast majority of those with severe to profound hearing loss—two questions must be asked, "Is the child acquiring a solid basis in the intended language (whether it be ASL or spoken English)?" and "How can the conditions for providing the input necessary for early acquisition be provided?" The child's language and the environment must be continuously assessed in answer to these questions. Furthermore, decisions about the choice of language and conditions should be monitored routinely throughout the child's development in literacy—well beyond the preschool years. Significant delays in a child's development should be noted and prompt a review of the choice of language and the conditions for learning.

Even when students clearly need the visual input of ASL, this language—or any language—can be used in ways that are incomprehensible if individual needs are not taken into account. Language development varies greatly among deaf students, a fact that is influenced further by the diversity of language approaches used in the United States. For example, when students change programs or enter a program for the first time as older students, their language base may be very different from their new classmates, both in kind and degree of proficiency. These new students

may have unique language needs that prevent them from coping with classroom conversations until they have further developed ASL through acquisition or instruction. Their language needs must be addressed with individual planning.

8. Develop bilingual programs (ASL as the first language, written English as the second).

Benefits: Bilingual programs have come about as a result of recognizing ASL as a true, visually accessible language and increasing its use in the classroom (e.g., Lane, 1992). Since there is no written form of ASL, however, students still need to learn to read and write English. This has led to the development of bilingual/ESL (English as a Second Language) programs based on the concept that students will learn ASL as a first language and English as a second language[2]. Many students in these programs learn English exclusively through print; others may learn spoken English as well, but ASL is the language of instruction for all. These programs are often referred to as bilingual/bicultural because of their strong emphasis on cultural affiliation. In fact, advocates of these programs may not view bilingual education as an *approach* to instruction, but instead as the natural progression of literacy development for deaf children (Hansen & Mosqueira, 1995).

In bilingual programs, ASL is used for social and academic purposes and as a linguistic support for learning English, the second language. Beginning very early, distinctions are made between the use of the two languages. With young children, this happens in developmentally appropriate activities that build language knowledge and skill indirectly (Erting & Phau, 1997). As students become older and better able to reflect on their knowledge of language use, the structures of each may be explored in more detail, typically using ASL to explain features of English, the lesser known language. Bilingual programs stress the need to develop competence in ASL before providing *formal* instruction in English. They do, however, advocate engaging deaf children in the same "literacy rich" early childhood activities that many hearing children experience (e.g., Erting, 1997; Mahshie, 1995).

These programs enable many students to use their conversational language strengths in ASL and their conceptual knowledge gained through this language to further their learning in literacy and all other curricular areas. The potential benefits of bilingual programming include early competence in conversational language,

2 Bilingual programs vary in their implementation and their goals, both in this country and abroad. While it is generally true that ASL is learned as the first language and English as the second, some students, such as those with moderate hearing losses, may learn spoken English as a first language but continue to learn and use ASL for the visual access it provides for learning.

a more timely acquisition of knowledge in all areas, advancement in the written skills of literacy as a second language, and cultural identification which influences self-esteem.

Cautions: It is possible for a program to claim to be "bilingual" but still fail at instruction in literacy for a variety of other reasons, including its interpretation of bilingual instruction. For example, efforts to develop ASL prior to written English could be interpreted by some in ways that might limit young children's early, natural experiences involving print. Many concepts about the uses of print are acquired during the preschool years through these natural activities.

Other factors that must be in place before bilingual programs can reach their goals include: adequate numbers of staff who are fluent in both languages and knowledgeable of the structures of both; training for staff in second-language acquisition, steps to ensure congruence between instruction and cultural mores (Nover & Andrews, 1998; Woodward, 1978); and support for families—especially those that do not already know and use ASL—beginning with the birth of the deaf child.

Of major importance to the success of these programs, too, is continued research into the development and education of this unique group of students. No other group of students has the educational goal of developing competency in two languages used in different modes. Efforts such as the *Star Schools Project*, under the direction of Steve Nover (1998), are needed to define, implement, and test bilingual/ESL models of instruction in the United States. In fact, multiple projects of this kind are needed to study bilingual programs with different populations of deaf children in this county—models that prove effective for one group of students may prove less effective for another.

Summary

Apart from their individual merits and possible misuses, approaches to improving instruction in literacy may fail to bring about more positive results for several common reasons. First of all, as indicated earlier, educators may see an individual approach as *the* solution to improving achievement in literacy and put all of their educational energy and resources into implementing this one approach. Second, any approach can be implemented without due consideration of students' individual needs and developmental patterns, thus failing a number of students. Third, educators may interpret any approach to improving literacy achievement with a narrow focus on teaching text-based skills—reading and writing—and not adopt a broader view of development in this area. Further, the goal of literacy achievement

using any method may be approached in ways that are out of proportion and even incompatible with students' overarching educational needs.

For the approaches above, and others, to be effective, educators must use them in flexible, multidimensional ways with individual students. They must succeed in establishing conditions for learning over time, both in the home and at school, in collaborative efforts involving many individuals. These conditions must foster progress on many interdependent fronts, not just reading and writing, in the development of literacy. When instructional approaches and methods are implemented within this context—with a child-centered view of the development of literacy—they have a greater potential to succeed. One should measure their success according to students' progress over time, not by the extent to which a program implements a particular method.

In other words, methods, strategies, and approaches do not come first in planning and instruction for literacy. Neither should they alone determine any child's programming. Rather, the selection of these—and the implementation of each—should be guided by principles, similar to the way choices about assessment should be made. Furthermore, the principles for instruction should come from the same theories about learning and development of literacy for deaf children that support assessment. They should take into account the active, reflective nature of learning; the holistic, affective, and social aspects of development; and the multiple intelligences of the learners. If the potential benefits and cautions of the approaches and methods discussed above were analyzed for supporting principles, they would probably point to the following guidelines.

Guidelines for Planning and Instruction for Literacy

The seven guidelines discussed here originate from information about the theories of learning in Chapter One and the development of literacy in Chapter Two of *Starting with Assessment*. They represent conditions that deaf children need with regard to literacy acquisition, learning, and instruction. Hopefully, also, they indicate areas where educators should put their efforts into both defining related practices and implementing them.

When reading these guidelines, one should keep in mind that they are interdependent. Each interlocks with the other in a way that requires consistency in how they are applied to individuals. Further, that consistency must be sustained across the program for students. In order to achieve this goal, those involved in the educational planning, including parents, need to reach consensus in their interpretation of these guidelines and what they mean for individual students. For that reason, programs should invest time in discussing theories of learning and the development of literacy that support these guidelines, and their application to individual students.

While guidelines are presented as questions addressing planning for literacy, they do not impact classroom instruction alone. In many cases, they point to the need for establishing conditions both within the educational community and in the home. Also, these questions should not be answered once and considered resolved for individual students. They should be revisited according to students' progress throughout development. In other words, they should contribute to a "living" curriculum for each child as he or she grows and changes with development. As mentioned, the degree to which these guidelines—and resulting practices—effectively foster development *over time* determines the success of an individual child's literacy program.

1. Do planning and instruction take into account a broad view of literacy and the interdependency of various areas of development: conversational language, motivation (affect), social interactions, and background knowledge in addition to text-based skills (reading and writing)?

A broad view of literacy includes planning for *dimensions* of learning (Syverson, 1995), including the development of conversational language and literate thought as well as the text-based skills of reading and writing. Students must acquire a base of knowledge (non-strategic) about the world around them, including language, as well as strategic knowledge they can use to solve problems and further their own

learning (Pressley, Goodchild, Fleet, & Zajchowski, 1989). A broad view of literacy demonstrates awareness of the *interdependency* of areas within literacy development: communicative competency, text knowledge and strategic use, social interaction, background knowledge, and motivation. It is unlikely that the text-based skills of reading and writing will develop in isolation from its associated variables.

2. Are planning and instruction based on developmental information—the assessment of individual patterns of growth according to universal stages of language and development of literacy beyond the current year? Does instruction address both the strengths and needs of students within their present stage of functioning as well as continuing needs from previous stages of development?

Children progress in their development of literacy in unique, uneven patterns of strengths and learning needs in related areas of growth. Over time, however, learning conforms to a recognized sequence of broad stages of development in which major tasks or areas of learning are achieved. Achievement of these major tasks is necessary for further development. Instruction should facilitate meeting these goals. However, children do not need instruction in skills and knowledge they already possess nor can they acquire skills and knowledge for which they are not ready developmentally. Further, as discussed under the previous guideline, their progress is likely to be impeded when critical areas do not develop in conjunction with others. As a result, the most effective instruction will be that which addresses current needs, as determined through assessment—including those from earlier stages as well as those within the present stage of development. Teachers can best respond to students' needs by capitalizing on their related strengths—their skills, knowledge, interests, and attitudes.

3. Is conversational language accessible, used in a variety of ways, and are students engaged in meaningful dialogue as much as possible? Is this language represented fully, clearly, and consistently? Does this occur in all environments, not just in a single classroom, and from year to year in a student's program?

One of the earliest decisions about a deaf child's needs regarding literacy concerns how to make conversational language accessible and comprehensible. The importance of acquiring language in early childhood has been described in Chapter Two of *Starting with Assessment*. For most deaf children, the natural answer to this question is to use a visual language, ASL. The decision about language accessibility does not stop here, however. In order for language to be accessible and comprehensible, it must be *fully, clearly and consistently represented in multiple contexts and over time.* Children must be able to interact with others who are proficient in the lan-

guage—native users of the language—in age-appropriate ways. It is important for those involved in a deaf child's development to recognize these related issues concerning language choice. If the conditions for representing language—whether spoken or signed—cannot be met, then language is not accessible. Recognizing how difficult it is to establish these conditions in some cases for a variety of reasons, this guideline should serve as a goal and a reminder of the importance of early and full-fledged language acquisition. It should not be used to justify language choice based on adult preference or proficiency instead of a child's needs. Nor should this principle be used to deter efforts on the part of anyone to communicate with a deaf child, whether that person is proficient in the child's language or not.

4. Does instruction reflect awareness of the languages used by the students—both according to purpose and degree of competence? Are instructional strategies used that are consistent with this awareness?

Related to the preceding guideline, it is important to identify what language or languages children are learning, and for what purposes (e.g., conversation, reading, and writing). Clarifying language use is necessary for establishing goals for the learning of literacy. It also should define the instructional process for literacy as well as for other areas of learning. For example, Peter V. Paul's book *Literacy and Deafness* (1998) has two consecutive chapters titled "Instruction and First Language Literacy," and "Instruction and Second Language Literacy." The first refers to situations in which deaf children are learning to read and write English as the same language they use conversationally. The second title refers to those in which students are learning to read and write English as a different language from the one they use conversationally. (Paul makes the point that references to second-language literacy for deaf children usually assume ASL to be the first language; this assumption overlooks the possibility that students, especially those from other minority cultures, may have some degree of knowledge of other spoken languages.) In these chapters, Paul describes separate approaches to instruction based on these differences. If the learning of literacy involves two languages, students' competencies in the first language should be used to support learning in the lesser known, second language. Strategies for implementing this are described in Paul (1998) and in other publications describing second-language literacy for deaf students (e.g., Mahshie, 1995).

Clarifying which language to use, and in which contexts, should also involve determining the degree of competence students have in the language. For example, a child's conversational language proficiency may support contextually rich social interactions, but not the abstract discussions that typically accompany academic instruction based on written texts. Goals for such a student should prioritize fur-

ther conversational language and concept development over formal instruction in reading, writing, or learning through print.

5. Does instruction put the learning of literacy, including the text-based skills of reading and writing, in perspective with other educational goals for students using, for example, an Inquiry Model for Literacy across the curriculum (Bruce & Davidson, 1994)?

The Inquiry Model for Literacy is based on a view similar to that described by Paul (1998) in his discussion of the literary critical perspective. According to Paul's discussion of this perspective, becoming literate is, above all, a matter of developing critical thinking skills. These thinking skills also apply to a variety of areas of knowledge, including technology (computer literacy), math, and others that enable one to contribute to and participate in society. In fact, according to this view, literacy is socially constructed by the participants in that society and determined according to cultural values. With this perspective, "great literature" may not even exist (p. 131); what is valued is determined by individuals in the context of their personal experience. Reading and writing, according to this view, are seen as one possible expression of thought. Furthermore, critical thinking is not dependent upon being able to read and write.

This perspective on literacy, held by many deaf people, implies an approach to children's education that is dramatically different from current approaches and should be considered. Presently, educational programs for deaf and hearing children are based on the view of development that children must learn to read and write before they can learn in other areas. The reason for this is that our society values print as the main way of obtaining information and furthering one's knowledge. Programs built on this view of learning heavily emphasize the teaching of reading and writing for a number of years. Indeed, it is the center of the curriculum.

However, putting learning to read and write at the center of the curriculum can lead to meaningless instruction for all students. It may harm deaf students (and many hearing students) in several additional ways:

- Developing competence in literacy in areas other than text-based skills may be overlooked (e.g., communicative competency, skills for social interaction, background knowledge, etc.). As a result, unmet needs in these areas may ultimately deter learning in reading and writing.

- Students may vary in their developmental readiness for this kind of instruction; some may need focus on continued development of skills from the previous level of development.

- By emphasizing learning to read and write—a long process and even longer when learned as a second language—learning other kinds of knowledge from non-print sources may be neglected.

An Inquiry Model for Literacy "assumes that knowledge is constructed through meaningful activity which may include, but is not limited to, conventional literacy activities" (Bruce & Davidson, 1994, p. 8). Reading and writing are still important in this model, but not in ways that exclude other modes of learning. In fact, Bruce and Davidson argue that in this model reading and writing become a more natural outgrowth of learning across the curriculum, rather than applied in artificial ways across curricular areas as they are in many "literacy across the curriculum" models. They explain that when literacy is applied to separately taught subject areas—or "across the curriculum"—these efforts often result in contrived reading and writing activities in these areas. In their model, inquiry—the exploration of ideas through discussion and social interaction—becomes the center of the curriculum. This approach is better suited to the broader view of literacy suggested in that it is more likely to develop other critical competencies *in addition* to text-based skills (e.g., language, critical thinking, conceptual knowledge about the world, and skills for collaboration and social interaction.)

6. Is a structured, balanced program of activities for teaching reading and writing implemented consistently throughout the program? Do the activities represent a balance between the ways that students learn—through acquisition and with instruction—and take into account individual differences?

The previous guideline—putting reading and writing instruction into curricular perspective for deaf children—is not at odds with the suggestion to use a well-structured program to teach these skills. More concentrated efforts are needed to improve the *quality* of instruction in this area, including devoting more time to *authentic* reading and writing tasks, rather than the tedious paper-and-pencil activities that often fill instructional time.

One way to improve instruction is by implementing a well-structured, balanced framework of reading and writing activities across all levels of development. That framework should include establishing conditions for both ways in which children learn literacy: through acquisition and with instruction. The framework suggested here satisfies that criteria by representing a model of language and the learning of literacy based on the following conditions: immersion, demonstration, expectation,

responsibility, approximation, use and feedback (Cambourne, 1984). This model has been represented in curricular frameworks found in many sources (e.g., Cooper, et al., 1997; Learning Media, Ministry of Education, 1985; Mooney, 1990; Routman, 1991; Strickland & Morrow, 1989). Typically, it includes the following activities:

- reading and writing aloud
- shared reading and writing
- guided reading and writing
- independent reading and writing

Each of these activities should occur daily, with the exception of guided reading and writing at the Emerging stage of development. However, the form these activities take—the balance between instruction and acquisition reflected in the activities—will vary for students at different levels of development. Examples of this variation are included in a more detailed description of these activities across developmental levels in Appendix G of *Starting with Assessment*.

Activities will vary, too, according to instructional goals for individual students, even within the same level of development. The language used by the students is another variable influencing the shape of the activities. Activities for students learning written English as a second language should differ from those implemented for students learning to read and write English as their first language. Finally, the implementation of these activities should be a collaborative venture between home and school begun in early childhood, not the exclusive responsibility of the educational program. Given these considerations, each activity within the framework is summarized below:

Reading and Writing Aloud

During reading and writing aloud, students are *immersed* in language as read or written by another person. During these activities, written language is the vehicle for communicating ideas and stories; the language learning is incidental (acquired) and secondary to the content of the text. For that reason, reading aloud must involve language use that is comprehensible to the student, whether that language matches the text or not. If the language used differs from the text, as in the use of ASL, then successive rereading—once ideas are understood—may be used to more closely approximate the text language if this is a goal for some students (Erting & Pfau, 1997; Schleper, 1997). In a similar way, during writing aloud, students ob-

serve another person writing as that person explains what is being written (the message), using the child's conversational language. During either of these activities, the student does not need to view the text and often does not. The focus is on what the reader or writer reads or explains about the text message. For example, young children, deaf or hearing, being read to at home most often look at the pictures accompanying stories—they are not typically expected to follow the print. The goals of reading aloud are to promote story enjoyment, to communicate information from texts that students may not access themselves, and to extend inquiry. Writing aloud has similar goals; both activities are used to *demonstrate* the uses of print as well.

Shared Reading and Writing

Shared reading and writing also can reformulate and extend ideas explored through inquiry, and these activities should arise from that context. During shared reading, the teacher reads to the students, extending invitations for students to participate as they wish. Proficient student readers may also lead this activity. During shared writing, the teacher or proficient student acts as scribe, and the group creates the text through conversation. During both of these activities, the written text is "shared"—viewed by all—allowing the reader or writer to demonstrate features of the written language. As with reading and writing aloud, the child's conversational language is used to discuss the text. These activities *demonstrate* reading and writing to students, helping them make associations between ideas, their conversational language, and written text. There is also an element of *expectation* in these activities as teachers invite students to join in if they wish—reading, or rereading, parts of text or contributing to the writing. This attitude of expectation—conveying the belief to students that they can learn to use written language—is an essential element in instruction.

Guided Reading and Writing

In these activities, students talk, think, and question their way through text as readers or writers with the teacher's support. Students *use* written language themselves to extend inquiry. During these activities, an increasing amount of *responsibility* is placed on the student for what he or she learns, both in kind and amount. Goal-setting with portfolios, for example, is one way to extend responsibility to students. As in the previous activities, adults' *expectations* about learning will influence the degree to which this happens. Too often children receive messages from adults that become self-limiting. ["How many ways can we give children the expectation that learning language-based skills is 'difficult,' 'complex,' 'beyond children?'" Cambourne, 1984, p. 5.] Starting with students at the Beginning developmental stage of literacy, guided reading and writing become a critical

part of their instruction in reading and writing, including mini-lessons targeted to their needs. During these activities, teachers must be aware of individual students' competencies, interests, and experiences in order to scaffold the experience successfully (Mooney, 1990). They must *demonstrate* new information in ways that will further learning and provide relevant *feedback* about students' use of language. In this context, teachers must create an instructional climate that is accepting of *approximations*—uses of language that do not display mature competence. Too often, especially with written work, students' approximations are critiqued as errors from an adult perspective, one that is based on competent use of language. Quantifying the errors in students' work (feedback through grades) is not as informative as providing constructive feedback—indicating strengths and providing information about selected, targeted errors. Furthermore, this practice—grading all errors—will undermine positive attitudes of expectancy.

Independent Reading and Writing

Independent reading and writing occur without the teacher's intervention or evaluation. The purpose of both is to build fluency and establish reading and writing as habits. As an outgrowth of inquiry, these activities encourage students to make personal connections, explore meanings, use critical thinking, and apply reading and writing in natural, pleasurable, self-chosen activities (Routman, 1991). A well-stocked, accessible library and a variety of tools for writing are musts. These activities promote the independent *use* of reading and writing, thus becoming another way that students take *responsibility* for their learning. They do not occur, however, unless teachers provide time and *expectation*.

In summary, the activities above represent a balanced framework for teaching reading and writing that applies across developmental levels. Implementation of these activities will vary not only according to level of development, but also according to individual strengths and needs, languages used, and language competence. Assessment should determine the nature of these variables in order to tailor activities to individual students. Finally, this framework does not exclude the use of other curricular materials; rather, it should structure their use.

7. Are instructional goals for reading and writing selected according to *important skills and strategies* that individuals need—skills and strategies that actively engage students in both bottom-up and top-down processing of print?

Teachers of all students, deaf or hearing, often feel pressured to cover—with even pacing—all of the material provided in an instructional program. As a result, many skills and objectives are taught with little but equal time invested in each. In other

words, skills and objectives are not prioritized instructionally in ways that reflect their relative importance to learning to read and write. Furthermore, important skills are neglected when teaching reflects the "widespread assumption that skills and knowledge form a hierarchy or pyramid" (Anderson, 1994, p. 11). According to this pyramid, teaching starts at the base of a hierarchy with letter and word-level skills and considers mastery in these a prerequisite to learning the higher-level skills of "inquiry, problem solving, and reasoning" (p. 11). One outcome of this approach, according to research, is that high-ability reading groups spend more time in intellectually stimulating discussions than do low-ability reading groups (p.11). This finding for hearing children undoubtedly applies to the instruction of deaf children as well. Although educators may claim to emphasize critical thinking skills, such skills are often squeezed out of the curriculum for many students, deaf and hearing, when instruction focuses on low-level, bottom-up skills.

Students at all levels of development need instruction that will facilitate both top-down and bottom-up processing of print.

With reference to the previous guideline, skills and strategies may be:

- acquired incidentally (e.g., through being read to, observing others writing, independent reading and writing),
- acquired through activities purposefully constructed to demonstrate their use (e.g., shared reading and writing), or
- learned through more direct instruction within the context of guided reading and writing activities.

One of the primary purposes of classroom assessment is to determine the nature of students' instructional needs—what skills and knowledge students are not acquiring and need to have demonstrated or taught directly in order to progress.

The following skills and strategies are important to the processes of reading, writing, or both. As a result, they represent areas of learning that have the potential to improve reading and writing through instruction—those that should be more explicitly demonstrated, or taught, to students according to need. These skills and strategies should be carefully monitored as students develop to determine that need. The reader is reminded, however, to approach assessment and instruction in the following with balanced consideration of the other, interrelated guidelines for literacy planning.

Bottom-Up Processes of Reading and Writing: Learning the Written Language

The purpose of these skills and strategies is to help students learn and apply knowledge of the cue systems used in English in order to read and write more accurately, automatically, and fluently. These systems are based on knowledge of the graphophonics, semantics, and syntax of English as discussed in Chapter Two of the book. Hearing children typically acquire this knowledge through their acquisition of English as a spoken language. Subsequently, their first language's knowledge base helps these children understand how these same systems apply to reading and writing.

The challenge in teaching these skills to deaf children is to determine how they may be learned visually—what is the visual application or complement to these skills—and how they are best taught to learners who converse in a different language, such as ASL. Further, a teacher needs to recognize that instruction in these skills is increasingly difficult for students who lack a well-developed conversational language. This is another indication of the importance of early, conversational language acquisition to learning to read and write.

Word knowledge (vocabulary and decoding): Word knowledge and automatic recognition are highly associated with reading ability (e.g., Anderson, 1994; Paul, 1998). Students who read well (accurately and fluently) recognize many words in print without having to figure them out. Thus, an ongoing instructional goal should be to increase the bank of words in print that all children—deaf or hearing—recognize. One of the ways that older deaf students learn new vocabulary is by applying context clues (Davey & King, cited in Nickerson, 1996). For this reason, strategies to use these clues should be taught to younger students who need them. Also, students need to read widely in order to gain vocabulary in this way. In addition to incidental exposure to vocabulary through reading, students may be taught new words through the use of word banks, semantic maps, dictionary activities, and other meaningful vocabulary activities. These activities should be part of the exploration of ideas and information and never the result of exercises designed to teach words at random.

The Inquiry Model of instruction in literacy previously suggested (see pages 14-15) facilitates teaching vocabulary through the purposeful, contextual exploration of new concepts. In this model, the overlapping use of conversation, reading, and other means of obtaining information about a topic, such as videos, increases the likelihood that vocabulary will be committed to long-term memory as part of conceptual knowledge. The importance of learning vocabulary this way—as part of conceptual learning (as opposed to teaching random, individual words)—is rein-

forced by the finding that difficulty with vocabulary is related to conceptual difficulty (Anderson, 1994, p. 10). In other words, the harder it is to understand the concept behind a word, the harder it is to learn—and remember—the word itself. This is another reason why it makes sense to base vocabulary instruction on inquiry—questions that explore subjects in meaningful ways—and focus energy on teaching the related concepts in multiple ways, not just through print. Conceptual understanding may be a determining factor in the development of vocabulary.

Students also need skills for figuring out words they do not recognize automatically. Hearing children learn to do this with phonics (figuring out the individual sounds in written words), word analysis, and by using context clues. Deaf children frequently use context clues to figure out new words, as mentioned above; they may also decode new words visually using morphemic word analysis, learning to recognize the smaller meaning units within words—prefixes, suffixes, root words (Paul, 1998). For deaf students who can hear phonetic information—discriminate and identify the sounds in speech—decoding may also be taught phonetically, in much the same way that it is for hearing children. It should be taught separately from reading, however. Although the ability to discriminate segments of sound in words—phonetic awareness—is strongly associated with learning to read for hearing children, the extent to which deaf readers use this information, or how, needs further investigation.

Sentence level knowledge (syntax): Just as students need a bank of knowledge about words in print, they also need an internalized, accurate knowledge of English language structure. Irwin (1986) discusses teaching knowledge of sentence processing according to microprocesses and integrative processes. The former refers to teaching students to recognize the ideas within sentences, the latter refers to teaching connections between and within sentences.

Irwin shows different ways to teach these skills. For example, she demonstrates how students can be taught to recognize idea units in sentences, assuming they know the individual words. Relying on sentence structure to help identify these ideas is part of the reading process and something that readers must learn to do automatically. Teachers can model how sentences are divided into phrases that organize words into ideas. The goal here is not to teach and have students practice identifying parts of sentences, but to show how language structure is used to further comprehension. Students need to be able to select and recall the important information in sentences as they read using knowledge of syntax as one cue.

Irwin explains, too, that as they read, readers must be able to connect ideas in sentences to a "coherent whole" (1986, p. 3) in order to remember the information. At the sentence level, she refers to this as the integrative process of reading. This

process involves making connections between words and phrases used to denote the same ideas, e.g., Jack-he; sugary treats-candy; ran-dashed; ...went *to the store*-...went *there*. It also involves understanding when words denoting ideas are left out, but understood, such as, "I want some candy," followed by "I do, too." Further, readers must understand connectives used to relate ideas within sentences or between sentences, such as conjunctions (e.g., and, also), disjunctions (e.g., or, either/or), condition (e.g., if...then...), etc.

As mentioned, Irwin provides specific ideas about how to teach these processes and others in *Teaching Reading Comprehension Processes* (1986). She makes it clear, however, that this instruction is different from teaching language skills in isolation. It is teaching children how to do what good readers do—the processes they use to comprehend print. Although she is addressing the instructional needs of hearing children, many—if not most—deaf children need this instruction as well. It cannot be assumed that deaf children will acquire this knowledge incidentally, although some do. Knowledge and competence in the first language, whether it is ASL or a different spoken language, should be used to help students learn the structures of the English language through explanation and comparison to structures they know well through their conversational language.

Top-Down Processes of Reading: Comprehension Strategy Instruction

As previously stated, higher-level, top-down skills and strategies are often neglected as teachers aim for mastery of lower-level skills. In many cases, this delays the teaching of important top-down strategies to deaf students for years. Not only should these strategies be included in instruction for all levels of students, but the choice of strategies and the ways they are taught should also be given careful consideration. One promising area of research that lends itself to this goal is the study of *strategy instruction* (e.g., Garner, 1987; Palincsar and Brown, 1984; Pressley, Johnson, et al., 1989). These studies have focused on teaching less proficient readers strategies they can use to help themselves understand and remember important ideas in texts. As with the language processes described in the previous section, the strategies themselves come from studies of those used automatically by proficient readers. These studies indicate that poorer readers either do not possess—or do not use—these strategies.

Proficient readers know many strategies or different ways to help them understand what they read, can describe how they use strategies, and are confident they can figure out what they read with these strategies. For example, they are competent at deciphering the main ideas in what they read. On the surface, some of these strategies may seem to be similar to the skills found in traditional activities for reading comprehension. However, Kelly (1992) points out that there is an important dif-

ference between the two, similar to Irwin's (1986) distinction between language process instruction and traditional skills instruction. Traditional comprehension activities focus on having students apply a skill, such as determining the main idea, to a given text with that task being the end goal of instruction. Strategy instruction focuses on teaching students a set of behaviors (strategies often involve a number of steps) that they can use to help them understand new texts. The end goal is learning to apply the strategy so that it facilitates comprehension with different texts. Thus, strategy instruction involves teaching:

- the *behaviors associated with the strategy* (e.g., how to summarize text by selecting the main ideas),
- *how to self-activate the use of strategies*, and
- *how to determine appropriate use of strategies* (to know which strategy to use when).

Strategy instruction is greatly oversimplified in this discussion. In reality, this instruction must be approached with thoughtful planning in order for it to succeed. First of all, strategies should be carefully chosen. Research indicates that a select number of strategies have proven to make a difference in reading achievement (e.g., Garner, 1987; Pressley, Johnson, et al., 1989). Some of these are listed below. Second, research also indicates that strategies are best learned through direct instruction that includes reflective use, feedback, and extensive application (e.g., Garner, 1987; Pressley, Johnson, et al., 1989; Paris, et al., 1991). Instruction is an ongoing process. The procedures for teaching strategies have been carefully defined in the literature. Finally, the success of strategy instruction appears to rely on students' beliefs about their abilities to further their comprehension (e.g., Pressley, Goodchild, et al., 1989). Attending to these beliefs is an important part of the instructional process. For further information about strategy instruction, readers are advised to consult the growing amount of published work in this area, including the references given above (Garner, 1987; Palincsar & Brown, 1984; Paris, et al., 1991; Pressley, Johnson, et. al, 1989, etc.). Some of the strategies best known for improving reading comprehension include:

Story Structure (e.g., Pressley, Johnson, et al., 1989): Students who have an internalized sense of story, either from someone's reading or telling them stories or from reading themselves, are more likely to understand and remember new stories. Students can be taught story structure and how to use this information as well. The goal of this strategy is to help students apply knowledge of story structure to understand and remember new stories.

Making Inferences—Activation of Prior Knowledge (e.g., Dole, Duffy, Roehler, & Pearson, 1991; Garner, 1987; Pressley, Johnson, et al., 1989): Students who can use their background knowledge to figure out relationships in texts are better able to understand what they are reading. These relationships may be explicitly stated in the text, or they may be implied. Deaf students can, and should, learn to more effectively apply what they know to help them comprehend written text.

Summarization (e.g., Dole, et al., 1991; Garner, 1987; Pressley, Johnson, et al., 1989): The ability to summarize the main ideas in a text is an indication of comprehension and enables readers to remember important information. Although summarization is a complex skill, there are specific steps that mature readers can learn to apply to this strategy. Also, the rudiments of summarization can be learned by students at all levels if they are taught to consider what a passage or story is "about."

Mental imagery (e.g., Tierney & Pearson, as cited in Tierney & Cunningham, 1984; Pressley, Johnson, et al., 1989): Using mental imagery to further comprehension has succeeded with some readers. This strategy involves having children—those who can process concrete, written text—form mental pictures of scenarios they read. This strategy can be easily taught; it also seems to facilitate remembering important information as well as understanding it.

Monitoring Comprehension (e.g., Garner, 1987; Paris, et al., 1991): Good readers monitor their comprehension, checking themselves when they do not understand what they are reading. When this happens, they use strategies such as looking back, reading ahead to see if confusion is resolved, or using other information (headings, pictures, etc.) to clarify meaning. Awareness of one's comprehension and steps to fix comprehension breakdowns can be taught.

These strategies, and others, should be sources of instruction for deaf children (Kelly, 1992). Both the selection and approach to strategy instruction should be determined by the developmental level of the student. For example, most strategies, as they are discussed in the literature, are taught to students who are Developing or Maturing readers. However, exposure to strategies can and should be provided at earlier stages of development as concepts unrelated to print. For example, Emerging readers can discuss the parts of a story that have been told to them by answering such questions as, "Who were the main characters? What did they do? How did the story end?" Strategy instruction with deaf children should be influenced by language use as well. In other words, strategies should be discussed in ASL and used with conversational "texts" in this language and in other non-print ways before they are applied to reading. As suggested in the literature, a few strategies should be selected for instruction and taught thoroughly.

Writing Process Skills and Strategies

Assumptions about the pyramid approach to learning—that lower-level skills must be learned before higher-level skills—are evident in the instruction of writing for deaf children just as they are in approaches designed to teach reading. Teaching often focuses on the sentence level skills and conventions of writing; lack of mastery in these prevents many students from receiving instruction in higher-level thinking and reasoning skill. This is despite the finding that higher level skills make the difference between good and poor deaf writers (Gormley & Sarachan-Daily, cited in Paul, 1998). In this study, two groups of deaf writers—distinguished by level of proficiency—made the same amount and kind of linguistic and surface errors. However, the better writers tended to have more cohesive, developed texts. They seemed to have a better sense of audience.

This finding, reinforced by the previous discussion about including both top-down and bottom-up skills in instruction, implies a need for using a process approach to teaching writing. In this way, both top-down and bottom-up processes can be sorted out instructionally. It also implies the need to emphasize audience awareness by using writing for authentic communication. The more students are exposed to readers' natural responses to their writing—not critical judgments—the quicker they learn to focus on clarifying meaning.

As part of instruction, teachers should show students how to use strategies that could improve their writing. As described in Chapter Two of the book, good writers are more reflective, put more time into planning, and reread their writing more often as they write (Krashen,1992). They also tend to focus on meaning, rather than mechanics, when they revise. As with reading comprehension strategies, these behaviors can be taught to students.

With a process approach, students can separate the tasks involved in writing in order to develop thinking skills in addition to sentence-level and mechanical skills. Planning what to write need not involve paper and pencil. In fact, planning for writing should proceed with extensive thinking and development of ideas through conversation before students begin to write. Drafting should be free of concern for errors, and editing should allow students to focus on mechanical issues without having to work on meaning at the same time.

Many teachers who use a process approach with students who converse in ASL advise having these students develop concepts in ASL before attempting to express them in writing. Mahshie (1995), for example, discusses how some teachers use "process signing" (p. 50) to have students plan as well as present "texts" in signed language (Foss Ahlden & Lundin, 1994). In this way, students learn to fully create

and communicate different genre—usually represented in writing—in their first language before attempting the same in a written second language. The process usually associated with instruction in writing—planning, drafting, revision, and presentation—is followed in the development of the signed text. Finally, translating into written text (working with the teacher, in small groups, or independently depending on level of readiness) allows students not only to create a polished English text, but also to make connections between the structures of their two languages in the process.

Conclusion

In summary, the seven guidelines suggested above describe conditions for instruction in literacy and planning that deaf children need in order to progress. These guidelines represent the following concepts:

1) a broad view of literacy,

2) instruction and assessment that is guided by development,

3) language use that is fully accessible and comprehensible,

4) language role clarification,

5) a model of inquiry for literacy across the curriculum,

6) a balanced framework of activities for teaching reading and writing, and

7) the selection of important top-down and bottom-up skills and strategies for teaching reading and writing.

Along with these guidelines, there are two factors that should be stressed. One of these is the role of instruction in literacy within the broader goals of education—a subject discussed in several places throughout this text.

As mentioned, instruction in literacy should not overshadow or be separate from what children learn of other kinds of knowledge. Literacy involves the communication of thoughts and the process of learning *through* conversation, reading, and writing. To teach any of these three as the end goals of instruction—devoid of concepts and critical thinking—is to defeat the purpose of learning these skills and will most likely result in failed instruction. However, such practices are common in instructional programs for elementary students, deaf and hearing. They are practices

that a) do not motivate students and b) hinder students' potential to further their learning.

The other factor that influences the outcome of instruction concerns the social climate of the classroom. Writing about hearing children, Anderson (1994) explains that "the individual is the creature of culture, and thus, learning and development must be construed as socially situated" (p. 3). Tierney and Cunningham (1984) raise the same issue when they make a plea for researchers of reading to have a "vision of learning groups," (p. 640) to guide research efforts. They elaborate by saying that learning is a social event and that the nature of the learning community cannot be disregarded in research or in practice. The characteristics of the group influence learning as much as the those of the individual learners themselves.

Fischgrund (1996) makes a similar point with reference to deaf children: "language acquisition, literacy, and learning and all of the skills associated with these processes depend upon human interaction, facilitation, and encouragement" (p. 2). Literacy, regardless of how it is approached instructionally, will not develop in a vacuum. This, too, is a way that instructional programs often fail deaf students. Two conditions must prevail in order for these students to benefit from the social dynamics of learning: 1) interaction and collaborative learning must be an accepted part of instruction, and 2) the conversational language of the classroom must be fully accessible to all.

Finally, when planning for literacy instruction, the most important message of this paper is that methodology should be driven by individual need. Too often in literacy programs for deaf children, this point is overlooked in the sincere attempt to make a difference.

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